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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON  
JAN 31 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Service of Cuban Volunteers in U. S. Armed Forces

In accordance with instructions contained in National Security Action Memorandum No. 54 dated June 26, 1961, the Department of Defense, in coordination with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and the U. S. Selective Service System, instituted a program to offer qualified Cuban exiles career opportunities for service in the U. S. Armed Forces on a volunteer basis, with the clear understanding that they were not being prepared as a combat force.

A suitable interval has now elapsed since the initiation of this program in August 1961 to report on its progress. Through the period ending 15 January 1962, 3,504 Cubans who expressed an interest in the program have been interviewed at the Cuban refugee center in Miami. Of this number 920 were determined to be eligible and had sufficient interest in the program to register with the local Selective Service Board.

Of this number 817 reported and were processed at the Armed Forces Examining Station in Miami. On the basis of mental, medical and security examinations, 441 were rejected as not meeting minimum U. S. service standards.

Of the remaining 376 otherwise qualified, 101 demonstrated an adequate level of English language ability, while 275 did not.

Of the former group, 59 entered the U. S. military services. A special school which, for international political reasons, operates under the auspices of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, has provided English language training for volunteers otherwise eligible and qualified. As of 15 January 1962, 29 graduates of this training had entered the U. S. Armed Forces. Out of the total of 376, 194 individuals are currently being processed and 94 have dropped out.

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In sum, during the five-month period ending 15 January 1962, the program has resulted in 88 individual Cubans entering the U. S. Armed Services, 11 in the Army, 18 in the Navy, 18 in the Marine Corps and 41 in the Air Force. These modest results when compared to the number of Cubans initially expressing interest in the program are attributable to the following factors.

1. By far the largest drop in numbers occurs after the first interview with those Cubans expressing an interest in the program. Apart from those determined to be ineligible by reason of age or some obvious physical limitation, most who drop out at this stage appear to do so as a result of learning that it is actually volunteer service in the U. S. Armed Forces and not in a new invasion force which is being offered. There is some evidence that many do not accept this explanation and continue in the program only to drop out at some later stage when they become convinced that it is not, as they seem disposed to believe, a cover operation for building a new Cuban combat force.

2. The next point in the processing where a major drop-out occurs is in the medical, mental and security examinations stage. Of the total of 441 rejected, 190 were for mental and medical reasons and almost all of the remaining 251 were found unacceptable on the basis of admitted sexual deviations.

3. Among the 376 who passed the mental, medical and security tests, 77 voluntarily dropped out of the program at one point or another for unexplained reasons, while 17 were unable to qualify in English tests after having completed language training.

This attrition rate, while high, is not surprising when compared to our experience with some groups of U. S. citizens where the rate of rejection for service in the U. S. Armed Forces has been 1 out of 2 and there is no language barrier to be overcome. Nevertheless, to the extent that this program is intended to assist Cuban exiles now in the United States to maintain themselves and to usefully employ and further develop their individual skills and abilities, it cannot be regarded as a marked success. The cost, particularly in the case of the language training funded by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, when compared to the numbers who ultimately qualify and enter the U. S. Armed Services, suggests that this is a somewhat expensive process for the results obtained.

There is little likelihood that our experience with this program will be appreciably different in the months ahead. Interest in it among the Cuban exile population continues but is not great.

I recommend that this program be terminated by 30 June 1962 unless a review by the Department of State should determine that there are sufficient reasons to justify its continuance.

*Roswell S. Epstein*

DEPUTY